

22ND MEU (SOC) DELIVERS FIRST MILITARY RELIEF AID TO BANGLADESH

ABOARD USS KEARSARGE, NOVEMBER 24 – A pair of Marine helicopters lifted from the flight deck of USS Kearsarge (LHD-3) today with loads of bottled water, marking the first delivery of US military aid to the storm-battered nation of Bangladesh.

The 750 gallon shipment of water was delivered to a relief-supply distribution hub in Barisal, a city in southern Bangladesh.

"I feel ecstatic," said Capt. Andrew Traynor, a CH-46E helicopter pilot with the Aviation Combat Element for the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). "(This mission) can show that the US military is not all about combat; we're here to help people."

Kearsarge and elements of the embarked 22nd MEU (SOC) arrived off the coast of Bangladesh early this morning. While the ship was on its nearly 3,500 mile trek to reach its current position, Marines and sailors aboard the vessel tested equipment, positioned supplies and readied for humanitarian assistance operations.

"The delivery today is a start, but there is more work to be done," said Col. Doug Stilwell, Commanding Officer of the 22nd MEU (SOC). "The Bangladesh government and military, in conjunction with relief agencies, are responding well to the situation – we will reinforce and support that effort."

To focus US military efforts on supporting the Government of Bangladesh relief operation, a team of key US military representatives led by Adm. Timothy J. Keating, Commander US Pacific Command, and Brig. Gen. Ronald L. Bailey, Commanding General of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, the lead US military commander on the ground in Bangladesh, met with representatives of the Bangladesh military, United States Agency for International Development, and the US Embassy. A team from Kearsarge led by Rear Adm. Carol M. Pottenger, commander of Task Force 76, was also present at the meeting, flying from Kearsarge to the nation's capitol city of Dhaka this morning.

"All parties concur with the way ahead for this operation," said Stilwell. "We want to support in a way that will have the most impact on reducing further loss of life and relieving human suffering."

The 22nd MEU (SOC) consists of Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261; Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment; Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 22. Elements of the unit remain afloat on USS Gunston Hall and USS Ponce in US Central Command's area of responsibility. The unit is on a scheduled six-month deployment.

For the latest imagery, please visit www1.apan-info.net

To download pictures and audio interviews with Capt. Traynor and other crew members present during today's mission, go to www.22meu.usmc.mil .

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